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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7583
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1185
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4729
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8273
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5835
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1595
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1604
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000371

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [MARR](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: SOME PROGRESS ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The UN Resident coordinator Dan Baker briefed donors on his meetings in Nay Pyi Taw where the Deputy Foreign Minister informed him that visas for all UN assistance experts would be issued and said the GOB was issuing clearances for relief flights with only one-day notice required. He stated that offers of foreign military assets to assist relief efforts would continue to be denied, although he gave an indication the GOB would accept UN or ASEAN helicopters. The GOB also requested enormous assistance for rehabilitating the monsoon rice crop in the Delta. Baker told the GOB that unless donors were allowed access to the Delta to monitor assistance, their requests would not be granted. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Acting UN Resident Representative Dan Baker briefed the donor community today regarding progress on humanitarian assistance deliveries and visas, and his May 12 meetings with government officials in Nay Pyi Taw.

Logistics:

¶3. (SBU) Baker reported that UN planes were arriving on a daily basis. The GOB cleared and released all cargo without delay, as long as the consignee was clearly identified as a UN agency. Shipments consigned to INGOs were more complicated, Baker explained, although the UN had successfully negotiated the release of a shipment consigned to Save the Children. Baker noted that shipments consigned to INGOs with long-established MOUs with the GOB were less problematic.

¶4. (SBU) The UN now faced the challenge of warehousing and transporting the enormous amount of assistance arriving daily, Baker explained. To complicate matters, only 5-6 ton trucks could be used to transport the goods down to the Delta because of the damaged roads and bridges. Baker made an appeal for donors with such trucks to donate their services to the UN to transport the goods. Baker also asked that donors bringing in bilateral commodity flights push the GOB for permission to land at Patheingyi airport. He noted that

while the GOB had indicated they would allow relief flights to fly directly to Patheingyi, the UN had not yet been able to obtain a flight clearance to do so. Other bilateral donors should push the GOB for permission to get flights to the airport closest to the affected area, he advocated.

Meeting the Deputy Foreign Minister

¶15. (SBU) Ban Ki Moon instructed Baker to deliver a message to Nay Pyi Taw regarding the UNSYG's displeasure over the reluctance of high-level officials to take his calls or answer his correspondence. Expecting to meet with Prime Minister Thein Sein, Baker instead met with Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint because the PM had been called to Rangoon. Baker reported the meeting went better than expected. The Foreign Minister greeted Baker with an unprecedented embrace and informed him that visas requested for UN officials had been, or were in the process of being granted. Maung Myint handed Baker a list of 28 UN visa applicants who were being approved, but did not say when, and 4 from the European Development Agency ECHO whose visas the GOB extended. Maung Myint continued that the MFA was giving clearances for relief flights, with only one-day notice required. The MFA only required a list of goods, crew names, and the name of the consignee. When Baker inquired about visas for international INGO workers and bilateral aid agencies, Maung Myint replied that these would continue to be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Distribution:

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¶16. (SBU) Baker pressed Maung Myint on the slow pace humanitarian goods were being distributed. Maung Myint defended the GOB's response and informed him that the GOB could handle delivery of the relief goods it had. The government had brought several boats down to the area, and was delivering most of the supplies this way. Baker told the donors the UN logistics team had verified that the GOB was indeed delivering supplies by boat.

No Foreign Military Assets Wanted

¶17. (C) UNSYG Ban Ki Moon had instructed Baker to ask specifically about the GOB's willingness to accept foreign military assets to deliver assistance to the Delta. Maung Myint was definitive in his answer. He informed Baker that the GOB had received ten offers of foreign military assistance and had refused all of them. The GOB would continue to refuse these offers, Maung Myint emphasized. Maung Myint confirmed that though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was handling flight clearances, visas for international humanitarian staff, and customs clearances for relief goods, the Ministry of Social Welfare remained responsible for distribution of relief goods. Baker emphasized to the donors that the GOB had not yet rejected using UN helicopters. The ASEAN Secretariat representative spoke up and said that during a May 12 meeting with the Minister of Health, the minister said the GOB would accept an ASEAN offer for helicopters.

¶18. (SBU) Baker asked about the government's strategy for returning those victims relocated since the cyclone. Maung Myint related that the government was very concerned about a second wave of death and disease, but emphasized that the Ministry of Health had the situation under control. The GOB was aware that most of the displaced were rice farmers and fisherman, who needed to plant their crops and get back to fishing to minimize the economic effects of the cyclone.

Baker also asked if the GOB would be willing to give permission for relief agencies to come into Burma to provide temporary relief. Maung Myint replied that the GOB had "learned their lesson from what happened in Aceh," and would not allow outside relief agencies to establish a temporary presence in Burma.

¶9. (SBU) Maung Myint emphasized the GOB needed more diesel fuel and informed Baker the Thai government was sending 400,000 gallons of diesel. He also informed Baker the GOB planned a diplomatic field visit to the Delta within the next four or five days.

Rice Crop Crisis

¶10. (SBU) Baker also described to donors his May 12 meeting with the Director General of Agricultural Planning and a number of his staff. The DG informed Baker that in 23 townships affected by the cyclone, 2.34 million acres of rice paddy had been affected, which account for 2 million of the 11-16 million metric tons of rice Burma harvests every year. The DG noted that if these fields could not be planted with the annual monsoon crop in the next three months, Burma's national harvest would be greatly affected. The DG continued that 200,000 acres now had saline intrusion and the government needed 9,000 metric tons of salt-tolerant paddy seed.

¶11. (SBU) The government also needed 50 kilos of fertilizer for every acre, an enormous volume that would have to be shipped in within the next three months. The local farms also need farm machinery, draft animals, implements, and to repair paddy field embankments in order to be ready to plant the harvests. For these inputs, the GOB estimated the cost at USD 75 per acre. The UN added that a micro-credit scheme would be needed to channel the money to the displaced

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farmers. If the International community could not find a way to meet these needs, it would have to find a way to feed the displaced, and those that depend on the Delta for food, for another year. Baker told the donors that he closed his meeting by emphasizing to the DG that such an enormous request for in-kind assistance and funds would not happen if donors were not able to have access to the delta to closely monitor the assistance.

¶12. (C) Comment: Although assistance is moving slower than we wish, there has been some progress over the past week. The technocrats are waking up to the enormous damage of cyclone Nargis and the significant economic repercussions for Burma. The UN and international NGOs are pushing behind the scenes to get what they need and their strategy appears to be working. Offers of foreign military assets appear to have triggered the regime's deep paranoia of a foreign invasion. But other, more benign offers are being accepted. The assistance we have provided to date should help build confidence in our humanitarian intentions. End comment.
VILLAROSA